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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the service function in U.S. institutions of higher education, focusing on a comparison of the social function of the university as discussed in two classics about the U.S. university: Robert Maynard Hutchins' "The Higher Learning in America" and Clark Kerr's "The Uses of the University." In conclusion, the paper introduces the ideas of Ernest Boyer and the authors own convictions about the topic and its implications for Latin American countries. The paper expresses agreement with Hutchins' argument against the university as a service-station and in his assertion that the university can become an important social conscience. Hutchins' ideas about the political manipulation of universities is especially pertinent to Latin American countries where political control has impeded the reform of higher education. The paper also agrees with Kerr when he states that the university should not be afraid of becoming more involved in service of the society. The paper agrees with Ernest Boyer, in Scholarship Reconsidered, that the version of service that once energized U.S. campuses must be given a new legitimacy, and that the mission of scholarship that lies in application must be realized. (SLD)

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The Social Function of the University

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Introduction

The American higher education institutions have a long tradition of service to their society. After setting up an historical background about the service function in higher learning institutions, I will focus this study on a brief comparison of the social function of the university in two classics authors of the American university: Robert Maynard Hutchins' *The Higher Learning in America* and Clark Kerr's *The Uses of the University*. In the conclusion, I will introduce ideas of Ernest Boyer and my own personal convictions about the topic and especially reflecting on the implications for Latin American countries.

To begin, I will first give a brief analysis of the basic ideas of the service function of the American university throughout its history. For historians such as Clara Lovett (1993), the American tradition of higher learning is rich with examples of educational pioneers who invented programs and organizations to fit the needs of the American society. For example, at the end of the first century of American higher education, the republican teachers reinvented the college with the establishment of a public role of the faculty. The new American college was one that could establish itself as an institution intimately affecting the lives of the people. This public role of the faculty set the post-revolutionary American college apart from the transplanted European model. In the new American context the task of transmitting moral values and particular religious traditions became subordinate to urgent secular tasks. From Lovett's point of view, one task was to educate the young for citizenship in a republic. The other was to provide common intellectual background and a shared culture for future American leaders who came from different geographical regions, ethnic origins, and religious affiliations.

In the second half of the 19th century, a dramatic transformation of American society occurred: It was the time of the extraordinary expansion of manufacturing and commercial agriculture, which required graduates with more specialized training than the traditional colleges

could provide. The Morrill Act of 1862, signed by Abraham Lincoln, provided income to be used to help fund state colleges. In 1890 the Morrill Act was extended, providing more funding for state universities at a critical period (Smith, 1991). The new land-grant institution was imagined in a symbiotic relationship with the state that supported it. The land-grant faculty had a public role not limited to local communities. They had visible roles as advisors to business leaders and state governments. The faculty of the land-grant college had a mission that put a premium on practical knowledge.

At the end of the 19th century the research university arrived in American higher education. John Hopkins University and the University of Chicago served as examples of this big transformation in American educational institutions. The research function became quintessential to the professors' activities of higher learning institutions. This style of university work resulted in the isolation of some professors in academic ivory towers, and in that sense represented a dramatic break with the American tradition of *public* roles for faculty (Lovett, 1993).

Finally, a great impact on the universities began with the federal support of scientific research during World War II. The major universities were enlisted in national defense and in scientific and technological development as never before. Nevertheless, that relationship did not finish with the end of World War II: currently, federal support has become a major factor in the total performance of many universities, and the sums of money involved are substantial.

Robert Maynard Hutchins' Ideas About University Service

In his book, *Education for Freedom (1943)*, Hutchins expresses his ideas about the aims of education. Hutchins states that "we all want to improve society, and we want college graduates because of their education to want to improve society and to know how to do it." The method that he suggests for doing so emphasizes the philosophical and historical studies.

Hutchins believes that the final goal of this kind of education is to develop a social consciousness and a social conscience. His idea is to serve society by educating its members.

In his book, *The Higher Learning in America (1952)*, however, Hutchins clearly criticizes the idea of the university service, viz., the notion that a university should be a service-station for society. He explains that a university may be in some ways "sick" because of its love of money, and this sickness may lead the university to respond too directly to immediately to social needs and demands. Undoubtedly, he says, the love of money and that sensitivity to public demands that it creates has a good deal to do with the service-station conception of a university. According to this conception a university must make itself felt in the community; it must be constantly, currently felt.

Besides, Hutchins believes that there are two fundamentally different kinds of professors behind the service-station idea and his own ideas of advancing knowledge. One that pursues truth for its own sake and another that responds to immediate social needs. Hutchins' conclusion is clear: since a university will not be able to have two kinds of professors and at the same time remain clear as to what it is about, it must follow that extension work can only confuse the institution (Hutchins, 1952).

For Hutchins, the position of the higher learning in America is that the universities are dependent on the people. The problem is the confused notion of "democracy" that people have. People think that democracy means that every child should be permitted to acquire the educational insignia that will be helpful in making money. Hutchins believes that democracy does not require that the higher learning should be open to anybody except those who have interest and ability that independent intellectual work demands.

The bottom line is that people love money and think that education is a way of getting it. They do not understand or believe in the cultivation of the intellect for its own sake. Moreover, the distressing part of this is that the state of the nation determines the state of education. The

solution that Hutchins finds to resolve this problem is that the university should be strong and clear enough to stand firm and show the American people what higher learning is. An expression of this is that the university should have an educational policy and then try to finance it, instead of letting financial accidents determine their educational policy (Hutchins, 1952).

The main objective of the university is to seek truth for its own sake and transform the students through the educational process in truth-seekers. Hutchins understands the purpose of the university as a preparation of students for life, not for vocational training. For that reason, Hutchins emphasizes the broadly useful general education (classical books) rather than the narrowly useful education proper of a pragmatist view. The universities today focuses on the "know how" rather than on causes ("why"). Hutchins' idea is that reason should direct science through the wisdom of the first principles. This way, students will have a common stack of fundamental ideas that will overcome presentism, utilitarism, and anti-intellectualism.

Clark Kerr's Ideas About University Service

In his well-known book, *The Uses of the University* (1963), Kerr states clearly that the American tradition of higher education has a particular importance in service activities. The British are noted for their emphasis of undergraduate life, and the Germans, for their emphasis of graduate life and research, but the American pattern is for the sake of the public at large.

The Land Grant Movement and the Hopkins experiment were answers from the higher education institutions to an industrialization process of the nation, which molded the modern American university system and made it distinctive. The federal government played a major role in this transformation.

Focusing on this movement, Kerr argues that the land grant movement came in response to the rapid industrial and agricultural development of the United States. Kerr states that universities, by that time, were thought to assist this development through training that went

beyond the creation of "gentlemen," and of teachers, preachers, lawyers, and doctors. Also, universities should collaborate via its research related to the technical advance of farming and manufacturing. Finally, the educational institutions cooperate through its service to many and ultimately to almost all of the economic and political segments of society.

For Kerr, the land grant movement was also responsive to a growing democratic, even egalitarian and populist trend in the nation. Pursuing this trend, higher education was to be open to all qualified young people from all walks of life. The clear conclusion of Kerr is that the land grant movement was a dramatic break with earlier American traditions in higher education. Nowhere before had universities been so closely linked with the daily life of so much of their societies. The cloister and the ivory tower were destroyed by being thrown open to all qualified comers (Kerr, 1963).

Kerr also emphasizes the influence of the German model on the land grant movement. The German model gave academic respectability and content to the land grant idea. German intellectualism and American populism were merged in the new university. Also, during and after the World War II, the federal support of scientific research in the American universities has had a great impact. The national defense has been a priority in the agenda of the American universities since then, involving substantial sums of money. For Kerr, American universities have been changed almost as much by the federal research grant as by the land grant idea (Kerr, 1963).

Kerr thinks that there are those who fear the further involvement of the university in the life of society. They fear that the university will lose its objectivity and its freedom. In any case, Kerr believes that the presence of the university carrying out its normal functions changes society fundamentally, but the attempted manipulation of the university, for the sake of specific political reforms, changes the university for the worse more than it changes society for the better.

Finally, Kerr argues that the "multiversity," as the word indicates, does have a variety of purposes. Moreover, from this author point of view, that is something worthy and substantial for the modern American university. The university is a pluralistic institution, where the representation of diversity is accomplished by the different communities that exists within it (students, faculty, and administrators). Also, Kerr believes that Mammon helps to empower the functioning of the university's bureaucracy.

Conclusion and Discussion

I agree with Hutchins' argument against the university as a service-station, especially because service is understood basically in terms of receiving money from the goverment and business corporations. In this sense, the university loses autonomy because the agenda is set by the financial agencies of the society. Moreover, following Hutchins, I believe that the university can become an important social conscience and ought to develop social consciousness in the society of which it is a part. As an example of a university in Central America focused on social problems and trying to serve as a social conscience, I can mention the Universidad Centroamericana of El Salvador, where six Jesuit priests were murdered in November 16th of 1989. The commitment to social change in terms of change of structures was the fundamental reason for the assassination in that university.

I think that a university, with all the resources that it has, should find a way of serving the society without losing its autonomy and its own academic personality. In this sense, I agree with Kerr when he states that the university should not be afraid of getting more involved in the service of the society. An idea to think about at this point is the concept of "social interaction." It is more than mere social projection of the university to the local community and society. Social interaction is a two-way relationship, in which both parties (the university and the community) learn from each other and serve each other with the resources they have. In the

implementation process it is more than important to identify communities with high levels of organizational development that could facilitate the service of the university to that particular community. In this sense, there will be an authentic alliance between that community and the university. A key tool in the social interaction process will be the use of non-formal education procedures for transmitting knowledge from the university to the community. We have to keep in mind that the relationship we are looking for is not of dependency from the community to the university. The final goal is independence and management from the community itself after a long-term relationship of mutual enrichment: from the university sharing knowledge in the different disciplines, and from the community sharing popular wisdom and hopes of a better life. A well-thought financial strategy should be developed in order to achieve the support of the society at large in this philanthropic project of university at the service of the great majorities. At the same time, the reward system of the professors should be reconsidered, particularly their social service outside of the academic units.

Hutchins' ideas about the political manipulation of the universities is absolutely clear in the Latin American countries. Especially in the national universities, the political control of these institutions is so strong that it closes the possibilities of real and complete reorganization that has been demanded by the society many years ago. On the other hand, Hutchins' idea of knowledge for its own sake is less applicable in countries as the Latin American because the reality of survival is an everyday battle for the majority of the people. The university cannot be an ivory tower while the society is struggling to gain a better life for the great majorities of people. As in the time of the land grant movement in the United States, Latin America is trying to find a good combination of education and development. Universities in Latin America, following the land grant tradition of the American universities, should assist the development of the countries through training and research related to the technical advance of farming and manufacturing; and, more than ever, through the service function of the university, they should

help the economical segments of society with consultation, technical assistance, and program evaluation, in the end, looking for a good interaction between theory and practice.

With Ernest Boyer in his book *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), I believe that given the difficult realities that faces the American society, the vision of service that once so energized the nation's campuses must be given a new legitimacy. The challenge then is this: Can America's colleges and universities, with all the richness of their resources, be of a greater service to the nation and the world? In Boyer words, we are talking about the important mission of the scholarship of *application*. Knowledge must be responsibly applied, and social problems themselves can define an agenda for scholarly investigation. In this sense, the institutions should reward faculty who establish links with institutions beyond the campus, relate the intellectual life to contemporary problems, and, in the land-grant tradition, become centers of service to the communities that surround them.

American higher education has never been static. For more than 350 years, it has shaped its program in response to the changing social context. The story of America and the story of higher learning are interwoven, and because of this intimate relationship, both the academy and the nation have been enriched (Boyer, 1981).

Today's world has complicated problems to be resolved, especially if we think in the Third World and Latin-America. The big question is whether higher education institutions are capable to adapt in order to give the appropiate answers to these new situations. There is a need to sustain the vitality of higher education in *our* time. More than ever, the university should have a vision dedicated not only to the renewal of the academy but, ultimately, to the renewal of society itself. The service function of the university is at the center of this discussion.

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